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WHY PAY FOR A CHILD IDENTIFICATION KIT WHEN YOU CAN GET ONE FOR FREE? ATTORNEY GENERAL DARRELL MCGRAW ENDORSES AMBERVIEW, A BIOMETRIC PROGRAM DESIGNED TO AID LAW ENFORCEMENT IN THE RECOVERY OF MISSING AND ABDUCTED CHILDREN. THIS PROGRAM WILL BE OFFERED STATEWIDE AT NO COST TO PARENTS

Missing children - the statistics are heartbreaking and frightening. Over 2,000 kids are reported missing every day – one every 40 seconds. More than 800,000 children are reported lost every year in the United States. Any parent who has sensed for even a moment the panic of not knowing where his or her child is knows that it is a parent's worst nightmare. For those whose child actually winds up missing, it is a nightmare from which the parent cannot awake.

Where some are fearful, others see opportunity. In recent years, many private companies have begun offering child identification kits. One such company, Guard-A-Kid, began business in West Virginia this past August. The owners, Harold and Stephanie McMillen, purchased a Guard-A-Kid franchise over the Internet. The McMillens paid Guard-A-Kid's creator, Kasmai Hossein of Miami, Florida, \$16,900 to market child identification kits in Kanawha, Putnam, Cabell, Wayne, and Logan counties. The kit consists of two laminated photo identification cards, a large identification card, and a CD-ROM containing the child's photograph, fingerprints, and personal data. Soon after receiving them, the McMillens started selling Hossein's kits at elementary schools, fairs, and festivals for \$15 each.

Rose Brown of Charleston became alarmed when her five-year-old daughter brought a Guard-A-Kid flyer home from kindergarten. Not only was Brown upset that the school was allowing a private business onto the grounds to solicit personal information from tiny schoolchildren, but she also knew that similar – and far more secure – services are available free of charge from responsible law enforcement. Brown, an employee in the Consumer Protection Division of the Attorney General's Office, immediately brought the matter to her supervisor's attention. Brown's concerns have prompted Attorney General McGraw to bring these services to the public's attention.

West Virginia can be proud to be ahead of the curve in protecting its youngsters. The biometric "AmberView" program is under development by the West Virginia High Technology Consortium Foundation in Fairmont, West Virginia (WVHTCF). It will make it possible to immediately broadcast a digital 3-D image of a missing or abducted child to law enforcement agencies, media outlets, and other sources within moments of an official Amber Alert. West Virginia's AmberView is the only program of its kind in the country. The WVHTCF conducted a pilot program in three counties, and AmberView will soon be offered statewide for free.

Here's how it will work. Schoolchildren throughout the State will be sent home with a consent form to participate in the program, along with a biographical data sheet. If parents wish to include their child in the AmberView database, they must sign the consent form and fill out a biographical sheet. School officials will then match the sheet and form with the child's current school photograph. The picture, along with all of the child's biographical data, will then be entered into a secure database and stored at the WVHTC Foundation. A biometric software program can convert the photo into a three-dimensional image before broadcast. Every year the photograph will be automatically updated with the child's current school photograph, and if a parent ever wants his or her child's information removed from the database, it will be done so immediately upon request. Moreover, the ONLY person who can access the database is the West Virginia Amber Alert coordinator, and not an unknown private

entrepreneur hundreds or thousands of miles away.

McGraw believes that AmberView will save lives. "While most lost children are eventually found, others never are. In fact, the U.S. Department of Justice statistics state that 74% of all abducted children who are murdered are dead within three hours of the abduction. AmberView will give law enforcement and the media all the information they need within minutes of an official Amber Alert. I am very proud that West Virginia is the first state to develop and implement such an innovative program," said McGraw.

Tips on keeping your child safe can be found at www.amberalert.gov. Consumers wanting more information about AmberView can call the Consumer Protection Division at 1-800-368-8808.

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